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Lakemba

FOOD AND ITS PREPARATION

Introduction

The basis of diet is yams and taro, to a certain extent breadfruit. These are commonly spoken of as "food," or more precisely "true food" or food "proper"; tasty food eaten with it, whether meat, fish, or pudding, is called *i lava*. To procure a relish for food is one of the chief interests. One advantage of being a wealthy noble is to have a relish daily. Pig is the most highly favored relish.

Formerly the nobles took pigs to some of the Southern Islands to be fed and put a tapu on them (*tambu puaka*). When the pigs were large, the nobles went to the islands to free the pigs from the tapu; or the animals were brought to Lakemba for this purpose, then slaughtered and a feast was made in which the people of the island shared. The few cattle kept are not used for milk.

Stewing

The most common form of cooking is boiling. Yams and taro are plain boiled. On Sundays fish is used for soup (*su*) and is then cooked with coconut cream and greens; the greens are often mixed with *kota*, which is made with grated coconuts and shredded prawns soaked in sea water and allowed to ferment from a day to a week; the vile smell is mitigated by cooking. Prawns and coconut make delicious soup, especially with cress added. Sweet potato leaves are sometimes boiled with coconut cream; young taro leaves so treated form a favorite dish called *pakia*.

Coconut cream is the basis of all tasty cooking; it is used with everything except yams and meat. It is made by grating the flesh on a toothed piece of iron turned up at the end and nailed on a board on which the man sits to grate; the gratings are put into a bowl and strained, like kava, with fibers of *vau*. With coconut cream a sauce called *miti*, for use with fish and yams, is made by pouring lemon juice and sea water on grated coconut and then squeezing the coconut; onions and chillies may be added.

While the husband is away at work all day the wife will sometimes catch prawns or collect shell-fish to make a special evening meal called the awaiting feast (*i wawa*).

Baking

The Fijian oven is of a type universal in the Pacific. It consists of a hole three feet or more in diameter, into which is placed small fuel, then big fuel, topped with stones. While the stones are getting hot, the taro,

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252 breadfruit, or whatever is required for puddings, is roasted, and banana leaves are heated to make them supple. When the stones are hot they are spread out with sticks and covered with leaves, on which the food is placed. If both taro and yam are put in together the contents of the oven are said to be like a sea-snake, in other words brindled. Taro is put in pealed, yams unpealed. Fish is usually wrapped in breadfruit leaves lain inside a fan palm leaf, an envelope of fish (*i sala ni ika*) it is called; but sometimes it is placed with sauce, inside a banana leaf like a pudding. A pig is singed whole, scraped, the legs are cut off, and the entrails removed by making a slit in the abdomen and one in the throat; then the belly is filled with hot stones and it is put into the oven whole; the legs are put in separately; the liver and the edible viscera are put in a leaf with water and put into the oven or else they are boiled and eaten by the workers. Oxen are no longer cooked whole, as it was found better to cut them up raw and let each man take his share home and boil it.

When the oven is full it is covered with old baskets and sacks, then buried. While the food is cooking, baskets are plaited of coconut leaves. The steam coming through the top of the oven indicates that the food is cooked.

354 Sometimes ovens are made in the evening and dug up in the morning; this is called *melo*.

Puddings

252 Puddings (*nggalu*) appear at most feasts, but are seldom made except for feasts, as they involve much labor.

Most puddings are made with taro, none with yams. For some puddings the taro is roasted to keep its flavor. The taro may be pounded or grated; grated puddings are more esteemed. For pounding, the taro is placed in a long trough. A man stands on either side armed with the stump of a coconut leaf and pounds it into a sticky mass (*mazu*); then an expert wets his hands, seizes some of the mash in each hand and squeezes it so that it oozes out between the thumb and forefinger, then shakes it off in pellets about an inch thick. One who has the knack can throw pellets on alternate hands with great speed. The pellets are rolled in the sauce, then put into banana leaves which are gathered up round them and tied at the top with a piece from the midrib. The sauce is always made with coconut cream, raw or cooked; puddings with cooked sauce are more esteemed. Formerly if the sauce were raw the banana leaf was simply tied round the top of the leaf; if the sauce were cooked, one end of the leaf was turned down like a hood, then tied round; now all puddings are tied alike.

For white *sivaro*, pellets are prepared as above; for sauce raw coconut cream with sea water and sugar is used. This is a quick method. Sometimes the sauce is mixed with *Dracaena* juice.

Another pudding of which I do not know the name, was made in this way:

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Steaming

The small earth oven (*lovo*) used daily in Lau is prepared as follows: 252

A circular pit at least 1 meter wide and 0.5 meter deep is dug in the ground. The same pit is used repeatedly. Wood for fuel is collected in the bush by boys, usually younger brothers of the earth-oven group. Fuel is laid in the pit, and on top of the fuel are placed 30 or more stones. Round basaltic stones of uniform size, weighing about 2.5 to 3 pounds, are preferred. (Frequently basalt stones are imported from the volcanic islands. When basalt stones are not available stones of limestone are used. A set of earth-oven stones is used over a long period of time.) Unless imported matches are available the fuel is lighted by means of a burning brand from a neighboring fire. If there is no fire to be had it is made as described above. As the fire burns the stones fall to the bottom of the pit and are spread out with a stick. 354

Breadfruit is either steamed whole or steamed after being scraped with a shell, dried in the sun, and cut in halves. Breadfruit is placed in the oven first, directly on the hot stones. If no breadfruit is to be steamed, the hot stones are covered with a layer of green leaves such as *viavia (Crinum asiaticum)* before the food is put into the oven. Sweet potatoes are washed and manioc roots washed and scraped before being put into the oven. For a feast they are wrapped in small coconut-leaf baskets. Tahitian chestnuts are steamed in their shells. Pumpkin and papaya are cut in pieces, cleaned, and placed skin down on the top layer of food in the oven. If pumpkin or breadfruit alone is in the oven sticks are placed across the oven before it is covered. To close the oven two or three thick layers of non-poisonous leaves, such as *viavia, sitchi (Grewia crenata)*, banana, or breadfruit are placed over the food; then a layer of dry coconut-leaf baskets or old gunny sacks; and finally a layer of earth tightly packed so that no steam can escape. After three or four hours the layers of earth and leaves are carefully removed. 252 [824] [824]

The poisonous varieties of manioc are made into a sort of pudding called *tapioka solo* by the following method. Peeled manioc roots are grated on the rough side of a piece of tin in which holes have been punctured. The tin grater is often fastened to a board and placed in a wooden bowl. A man sits on the ground, the bowl between his outstretched legs, or he sits astraddle a log to which the grater has been nailed. The gratings fall onto a coconut leaf. When tin is not available, a slab of fine coral is used as a grater, as was done in olden times. Fresh water is mixed with the grated manioc in the bowl and the mixture is strained by being squeezed through strips of the inner bark of the hibiscus fastened together at one end. The fibrous part of the manioc which is strained out is set in the sun to dry, usually on a piece of sheet iron, and the residue in the bowl is allowed to settle. Later the water is poured off and the starch, from which the poison has been extracted, remains at the bottom of the bowl. The starch is mixed with the dry manioc and the mixture is made by hand into balls about 6 cm. in diameter. Dry grated coconut is

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Hocart's statement (15, p. 126) that there is no spitting at the *kanusivi vale* ceremony does not hold for southern Lau. 342

The spitting ceremony marks the strict division of the interior of the house into three sections (p. 64), but, inasmuch as the house has been built by the communal labor of the whole village, the villagers have the privilege of entering the main doorway and sitting down in the lower part of the house at any time.

House Protection. Long poles and fish spears are usually kept leaning against the roof to hold down the thatch. On houses exposed to strong wind, coconut leaves are tied together in pairs by the upper ends and hung as roof weights, astride the ridgepole, to prevent the wind from lifting the thatch or carrying away the roof. The natives say that during hurricanes they crowd [731] together in small low houses and hold down the roof with their hands.

Occasionally dwelling houses are protected from evil spirits by magic prophylactics. They are usually directed against particular spirits. For example, the owner of the house in which I lived in Tokalau had planted a clump of giant taro (*via*) beside the steps leading to the main entrance to protect the inhabitants from Tutumatua (23, p. 127), an evil spirit, who had caused the owner's wife to become ill. If Tutumatua, who had elephantiasis of the leg, attempted to visit the house again, he would see the giant taro plant with its swollen, knobbed roots, and, ashamed of the resemblance of the roots to his leg, would leave immediately. A branch of *uthi* leaves is occasionally hung inside a house to protect it from evil spirits. 342 751

House furnishings

Shutters (*i songo*) are attached to the doorways of a house and used as a protection against wind and rain. There are two main types of shutters: *i songo mbekambeka*, made of *mbekambeka* mats (p. 203) hung on hinges of pandanus to one side of the doorway; and *i songo tambakau*, made of *tambakau* mats (p. 203) sewn together with pandanus, hung above the door, rolled, and tied with sennit. Wooden doors (*i songo papa*) hung on metal hinges to a wooden door frame are seen occasionally in modern houses. Formerly a hearth (*matandravu*), used for cooking and lighting, was set off by blocks of wood in the lower part of the house to the left of the main entrance. Hearths are still found in a few small dwelling houses on Fulanga. The smoke rises through the thatch or the doorways and protects the house from mosquitoes. When mosquitoes are particularly prevalent, green leaves are burned in fires built on the foundation mound outside the doorway to windward. 342 354

For light, wood from the *serua* (*Vaxaea vitiensis*) tree is burned in the fireplace. Besides firelight, oil lamps (*thina*) are used. The lamp consists of a scraped half coconut shell, in which a wick made of the midrib of a single coconut leaflet (*sasa*) wrapped in barkcloth is placed upright either by stick- [824] 373

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501 When the hull reached the shore a large feast was held. The hull of the small
396 canoe was prepared in the same way. Next the head- and stern-boards were constructed. The two canoes were connected by booms called *i kaso*. If the double canoe was built by a *lemaki* carpenter the small canoe (*thama*) was attached on the right of the large canoe (*kata*). A wide deck was constructed over the booms and a small canoe house (*vale wangga*) was built on
[354] deck. A fireplace (*mata ndravu*), at the end of the canoe house toward the stern, was shifted according to the tack. It consisted of a large hollow block of *puko* wood or a large kava bowl. Sand or clay was placed in the hollow, then earth oven stones. A wood fire was built on the stones and removed when they were hot. Food wrapped in green leaves (banana, breadfruit, or *etuevu*) was placed on the hot stones and covered with leaves.

While the canoe was under construction it was tabu for any person unaccompanied by the carpenter to look at it. If the tabu was broken the offender had to make atonement (*ore*).

A Fijian double canoe of the *sauthoko* type, belonging to Percy Turner of Suva, has been described by Hornell (16, pp. 319-324).

A great feast was held at the launching of a double canoe. The chief, standing on the float, directed the race. Then the carpenter presented property consisting of woodwork collected from his clan, together with the canoe itself, to the chief. This was called *musu wangga*. In return the chief gave craft articles, a piece of land, or a woman to the carpenter.

On the double canoe parts of the deck called the *nggela tambu*, the *thaku*
[622] *thamba*, and the *vale wangga* (canoe house) were reserved for the chief. A chief's canoe carried a flag of *masi* attached to the yard.

Tambetembete

501 Double canoes exceeding the length of a single tree (at most about 13 meters) were made of planks built up on a keel. This type was called *tambetembete*. None is found in Fiji today, but a double canoe believed to be of the *tambetembete* type is described and illustrated by Williams (27, vol. 1, pp. 73-76, fig. p. 86).

An old informant, Semitchi of Mbutonikoro, Mothe, told me of a *tambe-*
[731] *tembete* double canoe called Tangimautchia. It was built on Fulanga just before the measle epidemic in 1875 by Setareki, *matai* (carpenter) *Yalona*, from Tonga, for Tupou, a Tongan chief. Tupou remained in Tonga and sent his herald, Hala Hafihafi, to Fulanga. Hala Hafihafi and his wife and children remained on the island during the two years required to construct the canoe. The *tambetembete* was of greenheart with mat sail. Semitchi, who was about 16 years old at the time, was a member of the crew which sailed her to Tonga. Ten of the crew were Tongans. There were about 25 men and women aboard. The canoe carried a load of mats from Fulanga. They sailed north-

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Gaming Grounds

A long shallow ditch (*rara ni tchingga*), called Wainikeli, which the natives say was formerly used for the dart game (*tchingga*), was examined in east central Wangava. The site has been described on pages 78-79. 172

Canoe Builders' Pit

On the beach at Naimarai, reputed to be the site of a village located on the northeast coast of Kambara and formerly occupied by Tongan canoe builders, is a pit which informants say was used in building double canoes. The rough hull was drawn across the mouth of the pit so that the canoe builders could stand conveniently in the pit while building up and finishing the hull. This was probably used especially for the *tambetembete* type of Tongan double canoe with keel. 172 396

Fishponds

On Mothe fishponds bordered by walls of basaltic stones were seen. These have been described on pages 135-136. 172

Cannibal Earth Oven

The site of an earth oven which informants said was formerly used for steaming human bodies (*lovo ni mbakola*), was seen near Undu village. It consisted of a somewhat circular pit in the ground, larger than the usual pit used to steam food for a feast. [354] [266]

Shell Mounds

An extensive, low shell mound, formed of the shells of edible mollusks, was seen on the shore at Yawalevu, Fulanga. The edge of the mound was used for a sweet potato garden. By pushing aside the shells which covered the surface of the ground and scraping the earth below into a mound, a small circular clearing had been made for each sweet potato plant.

Potters' Clay Site

The natives of Kambara say that potters' clay was formerly obtained from Matanimoko at the foot of Ndelaioloi near Lomatchi. It was made into pots by the women of Levuka, Lakemba, when they visited the island on regular trading expeditions. The women of southern Lau were not potters but obtained their pots from the Levuka women, from Matuku, Kandavu, and Tailevu (24, pp. 111-112). [323] [438]

Stone Quarries

It is probable that sites of quarries, which formerly supplied basalt for the manufacture of stone implements used in southern Lau, occur on the volcanic islands but none was located. [324] [316]